

# VIA WIRELESS

Novelized by Thompson Buchanan From the Successful Play of the Same Name

By WINCHELL SMITH, FREDERIC THOMPSON and PAUL ARMSTRONG

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(Continued)

"May I ask when you were in Pittsburgh did you question a man named Marsh?"

"You mean the draughtsman? No," replied Bradley. "Do you think he knew anything of it?"

Sommers shook his head in puzzled fashion.

"He may have known something. He ought to. He was there."

"Did you ever see a Mr. Rhinestrom about there?" asked Bradley next.

Sommers still looked puzzled.

"No, I didn't see him, but I heard a great deal of him. Marsh was greatly interested in the gun Rhinestrom had invented."

Bradley looked keenly at the naval officer.

"Oh, Marsh was interested in that gun? But you never saw Rhinestrom about there?" he said significantly.

Again there came that startling flash to Sommers. He began to suspect just how blind he had been, but before he could say another word Pinckney came out quickly from the hotel. The general manager stopped, surprised at sight of the naval lieutenant.

"How are you, Sommers?" he said coldly.

Sommers bowed with equal coldness as Bradley stepped in between the two men.

"I've been most anxious to see you, Mr. Pinckney," the secret service agent began.

Pinckney looked at him, surprised.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"United States secret service man detailed on the Sommers gun case," came the quick reply.

Pinckney suppressed an involuntary start.

"Oh, I see," he said. "I'm down-right sorry. Most unfortunate affair, indeed. But what can I do?"

Bradley smiled pleasantly.

"Why, answer a few questions, if you will," he suggested.

The general manager could not keep down all expression of annoyance, but he knew it would never do to completely antagonize the secret service man on the case, so he forced an apology for a smile.

"Of course, with pleasure. But I'm rather pushed for time. We sail almost immediately."

"In that case, I'll begin at once."

He turned to the government agent undisturbed.

"Mr. Durant has kindly consented that I should make a thorough investigation at the works in Pittsburgh when I return. He is anxious to do all in his power to help me find upon whom the blame rests."

The general manager drew himself up.

"Blame," he said sternly.

"Yes, blame," was the pointed reply.

Again Pinckney made a move for delay. He wanted to get to Pittsburgh as quickly as he could to see Marsh and cover up all tracks before he answered any questions.

"Can't you defer all questions until the investigation in Pittsburgh?" he suggested, "I'm in a great hurry, and in Pittsburgh I will have all facts before me and can answer fully."

But Bradley was a man not to be denied.

"I should prefer asking one or two now," he said and without waiting for response put his first query bluntly.

"What is your belief, Mr. Pinckney, as to the cause of this unfortunate action?"

"My belief?" said the general manager blankly.

"Yes. Do you think the gun was killed in the tempering bath at your arsenal?"

Pinckney's face flushed.

"I do not," he retorted angrily. "I think the gun was constructed on theory, and the theory was unsound."

Sommers, standing by, made a quick, angry movement, but a sharp look from Bradley restrained him. The secret service man was apparently very much interested and thoroughly willing to accept Pinckney's idea.

In fact, agreeing with people was part of Bradley's stock in trade, and, in fact, in Washington it was generally admitted that this particular star of the secret service bureau could agree with more people and get more information without offense than any man in the service. Now, apparently, he was Pinckney's friend.

"M'm—very interesting," he said.

"Now, what do you think of the Rhinestrom gun, Mr. Pinckney?"

Pinckney looked at his questioner sharply, but the face before him showed only bland agreement and casual interest.

"I consider the Rhinestrom gun the best gun that has been invented," said the general manager firmly.

"And have you controlled the patents of the Rhinestrom gun?"

"The Durant steel works control them," corrected the general manager.

"And you have a large government order for the Rhinestrom gun now that the Sommers gun is out of the way?" persisted the unflinching questioner.

Pinckney had been losing more and more of his self-control as each succeeding home thrust struck him.

"I don't like what that question implies, sir," he exclaimed angrily.

Bradley made a slight conventional nod.

"I'm sorry," he said indifferently.

The conspirator had begun to realize he was fencing a strong, shrewd antagonist and it would not do to lose his temper, so he hastened to explain.

"We had the Rhinestrom order before the Sommers gun was forged."

"Who is Rhinestrom?" commanded Bradley, with a sudden sternness that took the general manager completely by surprise. Pinckney had not anticipated that question.

passed that question. For a moment he hesitated, repeating blankly after the government agent:

"Who is he?"

"Bradley's manner had changed abruptly from bland curiosity to stern determination to know."

"Yes," he said sharply, "who is Rhinestrom? Where does he come from? Where is he now? Whom did you deal with?"

Pinckney hesitated.

"Why, I have no idea who his friends are."

"Does Mr. Durant know?" asked the detective.

"Still Pinckney fenced."

"I—I couldn't say, really. Better ask Mr. Durant."

"I did," retorted Bradley shortly.

Pinckney saw it was time to end this cross questioning if he was to get away safe. The government agent was shrewder than he thought, and this thin spit in his defense—the identity of Rhinestrom—seemed perilously weak. The only thing to do was to end it at once.

"I haven't time to talk to you further," he said.

Bradley made a restraining gesture.

"Just a moment more, Mr. Pinckney. Has Rhinestrom ever been at your works?"

"No, sir," returned the general manager promptly.

"Then how does Marsh know him?" demanded the government agent sternly.

It was pure bluff, but Pinckney had no idea of that, and he took the bait, hook, sinker and all.

"Marsh," he exclaimed blankly.

"Why, Marsh doesn't know him."

For the first time Bradley permitted himself a sneering smile.

"I can only go by what Marsh says," he declared. "Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Pinckney, that Marsh, the draughtsman of the Durant steel works, does not know the inventor of the Rhinestrom gun?"

Pinckney's face was brick red with anger now, but inside there was a quiver of apprehension that Marsh had talked. If so, all was up. Anyway this questioning must stop.

"I'm not going to talk to you further, sir," he declared angrily. "Your manner is distasteful to me."

Again there came that mocking, satirical apology.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. But, Mr. Pinckney, you don't mind admitting that the man in charge of forging the Sommers gun was drunk?"

Pinckney hesitated.

"I do admit that," he said, "but he did his work properly. I was there myself to watch him. Mr. Sommers was there too."

Instantly the secret service agent turned on Sommers.

"Were you in the furnace room, Lieutenant Sommers, at the time the gun went into the bath?"

"Yes, sir," admitted the naval officer, "I was."

"Did it go in at the right temperature?"

It was Sommers' time to hesitate.

"I—I don't know," he admitted. "I didn't see it."

"You were in the furnace room," exclaimed the secret service man, "and you did not see your own gun go into the tempering bath?"

"There was a quarrel with the foreman," said Sommers hesitatingly.

"What were you quarreling about?" asked Bradley.

It was the one question that Sommers could not answer. How could he bring Frances into it? Bradley was waiting impatiently for his reply.

"I can't explain the cause of that quarrel," finally declared the naval officer.

"I do not," he retorted angrily. "I think the gun was constructed on theory, and the theory was unsound."

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